

Beef Stew in a Pumpkin Tagine

Serves 6-8

This stew takes a bit of effort to prepare, with many ingredients to chop and multiple steps, but it is well worth the effort. The stew may be made ahead of time and baked the day you plan to serve it. It is a nice dish for a Thanksgiving meal. For many years, while my girls were growing up, I prepared this on Halloween, so we had an easy (made ahead) and healthy dinner before indulging in loads of Halloween candy. I called it “Witches Brew” and placed a little cardboard cut out attached to a toothpick in the top of the pumpkin lid when serving. Be certain to use a good, baking pumpkin, such as a Cinderella pumpkin. The pumpkins designed for Jack’O lanterns are often not very tasty or meaty.

- 4 Tbsp canola oil
- 2 lb lean beef (shoulder or round) cut in 1-in cubes
- 3 Tbsp cognac, optional
- 1 c. onion, coarsely chopped
- ½ c. green onion, coarsely chopped
- ½ c. bell pepper, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 c. beef stock
- 1 c. Madeira or sherry
- 3 med tomatoes, coarsely chopped (or 1 28oz can tomatoes)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp oregano
- ¼ tsp fresh black pepper
- 1 ½ lb. potatoes, cut in ½-in cubes
- 1 ½ lb. sweet potato, cut in ½-in cubes
- 3 ears corn, fresh or frozen, cut into 1-in rounds
- 14 dried apricots
- 14 dried pitted prunes
- 1 10-12 lb pumpkin, scrubbed
- ½ c. butter, melted
- 1 c. lightly packed brown sugar
- 3 Tbsp cinnamon



Heat 2 Tbsp oil in 4-5 quart sauce pan on medium heat. Add beef in batches and brown on all sides. Return all meat to pan; add cognac. (If you want to make a dramatic display, warm cognac briefly, ignite and pour over meat.) Transfer meat and juices to platter. Set aside.

In same saucepan, combine remaining oil, onions, bell pepper and garlic and cook on medium heat, stirring frequently until vegetables are soft and lightly browned. Pour in stock, Madeira, increase to high heat and bring to boil. Add meat and juices back to pan. Stir in tomatoes, bay leaf, salt, oregano and pepper. Cover, reduce heat to low and simmer for 15 minutes. Add potatoes, cook covered 15 minutes longer. Add corn and dried fruit, cook covered another 5 minutes. Keep warm or reheat in microwave if made ahead of time, while you prepare pumpkin.

Preheat oven at 375° F. Slice pumpkin about 4-inches down from stem to form a lid. Do NOT remove stem. Scrape seeds and stringy fibers from lid and shell. (Be certain to get ALL the fibers, as they turn into a horrible gooey texture when baked. I learned this the hard way.)

Brush melted butter inside pumpkin shell. Sprinkle with sugar and cinnamon. Replace lid. Place in a roasting pan and bake about 45 minutes, until almost tender (pulp should be somewhat resistant when pierced and shell firm enough to hold stew without collapsing). Pour juices that accumulate into stew (a turkey baster is useful for getting the juice). Place stew inside pumpkin shell and bake another 15 minutes.

Transfer pumpkin to a large platter. To serve, ladle stew into bowls, scraping some of pumpkin pulp from shell for each serving.